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Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations

Report on the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit for the consideration of the General Assembly his comments on the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the programme management and administrative practices of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.

Summary

In July 2005, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an inspection of programme and administrative management of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and issued a report thereon (A/61/61). The present note provides clarification on issues raised by OIOS, particularly those regarding organizational structure; information and knowledge management; programme support; and executive management.

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I. Introduction

1. In spite of the political instability and insecurity in the region, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) has been able to effectively and successfully implement its work programme, responding to the requests of Member States in a flexible and demand-driven manner. ESCWA welcomes the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) and the recommendations contained therein and wishes to make the following clarifications in regard to its position.

II. Organizational structure

2. The comments of OIOS concerning the organizational structure have been noted. At the same time, the use of multidisciplinary teams should not be dismissed, since they have been useful for responding quickly to changing needs and emergency situations, particularly for activities that are undertaken in relation to countries facing conflict, changing needs and priorities. The use of a team-based approach facilitates the attainment of objectives by focusing on expected results of a multidisciplinary nature rather than just on the delivery of disparate individual outputs.

3. The teams are project-specific and are disbanded and/or reconstituted once results have been achieved, or they are assigned to other tasks to meet new needs. The use of teams is intended to promote a dynamic approach to the work of ESCWA. It has also promoted a culture of teamwork and cross-fertilization of ideas and solutions to the task at hand.

III. Statistics subprogramme

4. ESCWA has continually closely monitored the performance of its statistics activities. It has taken steps, in consultation with the relevant offices at Headquarters, to remedy some of the challenges of decentralization through the pooling of statistics resources under a separate subprogramme to ensure proper management and monitoring of statistical activities, while maintaining statistical expertise within the substantive divisions. During its twenty-fourth ministerial session, ESCWA carried out extensive consultations through an open and direct dialogue with Member States in order to evaluate the merits of decentralization of statistics in comparison with those of the Statistics Division disbanded in 2003, with a view to determining the best course for serving the interests of the region. The Member States were also presented with the organigramme of the strategic framework for the biennium 2008-2009, in which ESCWA proposed the re-establishment of the Statistics Division.

IV. Information and knowledge management

5. With respect to information and knowledge management, ESCWA has re-established its Information and Communication Technology Committee, which has been assigned the task of developing an information and communication technology and knowledge-management strategy for ESCWA. Development of web-based tools and procedures for knowledge management is at the core of the strategy.

In accordance with the findings documented in the OIOS report, the strategy will be specific, goal-oriented and well coordinated.

V. Programme support

6. In paragraph 41 of the report, OIOS made a number of observations relating to some individuals, and on the basis of their findings made recommendation 16 (contained in paragraph 72). ESCWA did not agree with the recommendation because it did not concur with the findings and wished to emphasize that the decisions by the Human Resources Management Section are taken, and will continue to be taken, in full compliance with the regulations and rules governing human resources policies and are made in full coordination with the Office of Human Resources Management and other concerned United Nations departments and entities. The Chief of the Human Resources Management Section has established good communication lines with senior management, and there is a process of regular consultation and exchange of views.

7. For the 2004/2005 performance appraisal system (PAS) cycle, ESCWA has since achieved 100 per cent compliance in the completion of performance appraisal reports. The same result is expected for the 2005/2006 PAS cycle. In addition to achieving full compliance of PAS completion, the Human Resources Management Section of ESCWA is working closely with programme managers to achieve a qualitative improvement in the performance appraisal process by providing training in a number of areas related to managing performance, and by creating a culture of regular and constructive discussion between staff members and supervisors on performance and staff development.

VI. Executive management

8. ESCWA has rejected recommendation 19, because it considers that it has always adhered to the norms of transparent and effective oversight and the principle of addressing accountability in a consistent and fair manner. The observations regarding "ad hoc and arbitrary decision-making" are therefore not accepted by ESCWA management.

9. With regard to the observations on the substantive and administrative responsibilities of the Deputy Executive Secretary, ESCWA notes that, in addition to his substantive function, the Deputy Executive Secretary has been the Head of the Statistics Coordination Unit, the Head of the Interdivisional Statistics Steering Committee, the Chairperson of the Publications Committee, the Chairperson of the Trust Fund Committee, the Chairperson of the Project Review Committee, the Chairperson of the Joint Monitoring Committee and the Management Review Committee, as well as the head of several task forces.

10. It should also be noted that the absence of an advisory body does not preclude the existence of other functional mechanisms for obtaining sound advice and judicious opinions. The Executive Secretary holds weekly cabinet meetings with the senior management of substantive and administrative divisions to share information and solicit advice. Special meetings with staff are held as required and ad hoc advisory committees on special issues are formed, as and when necessary. On